

STATEMENT OF JANE F. GARVEY, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL AVIATION
ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE
AND TRANSPORTATION, ON AIRPORT CAPACITY IN THE CHICAGO AREA.
JUNE 15, 2001

Senator McCain and Members of the Committee:

It is a pleasure to appear before you today to discuss increased airport capacity in the Chicago region, particularly the efforts to reduce delays at O'Hare and to landbank a site for a possible South Suburban airport. I am particularly pleased to be here in Chicago because it is recognized as such an important part of the National Airspace System (NAS).

Today's hearing is very timely because it focuses our attention on congestion not only in this region but also in our aviation system as a whole. Secretary Mineta has made the effort to deal with the capacity limitations in our aviation sector--one of the underlying causes of airline delays--one of his top priorities. As we enter the summer travel season, we will have daily reminders of the need to employ both short and long-term measures to meet the challenge of delays--a challenge that will grow increasingly difficult as forecasted growth continues.

I think it is important to understand our many ongoing efforts to address the challenges posed by congestion. The *Airport Capacity Benchmark Report 2001*, which the Secretary released last month, documents that we are faced with very challenging capacity issues.

Our hope is that this report will provide valuable data that will be used to assist the

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), airports, airlines, and other system users in making informed decisions and investments that can ultimately help better manage the ever increasing demand for capacity, while at the same time reducing the causes of delays. Much of the information in the report documents what you, as frequent users of the system, probably know intuitively. But this information now provides all of us, Congress, the FAA, the airports, the airlines, and local communities, with a common set of metrics to measure the capacity of an airport.

Our report documents that there are a handful of airports--including Chicago's O'Hare International airport--at which demand exceeds capacity and where, in adverse conditions, the resulting delays have impacts throughout the National Airspace System (NAS). In 2000, O'Hare was ranked the second busiest and the third most delayed airport in the country. Overall, slightly more than 6% of all flights were delayed significantly (*i.e.* more than 15 minutes). On good weather days, scheduled traffic is at or above the capacity benchmark (200-202 flights per hour) for 3 1/2 hours of the day and about 2% of the flights are delayed significantly. In adverse weather, which may include poor visibility, unfavorable winds, or heavy precipitation, capacity is lower (157-160 or fewer flights per hour) and scheduled traffic exceeds capacity for 8 hours of the day. The number of significantly delayed flights jumps to 12%.

Planned airport construction at O'Hare, known as the World Gateway Program, includes terminal construction, taxiway extension, and modifications that will reduce gate congestion delays and delays on the airport surface, but will not materially add to airside

capacity. Improved avionics and air traffic procedures are expected to increase O'Hare's capacity in good weather (by 6%) and in bad weather (by 12%) over the next 10 years compared to today. However, demand at O'Hare is projected to grow by 18% over the next decade. This imbalance between capacity and demand growth can be expected to significantly increase delays at O'Hare.

Of course, O'Hare is not alone. Other airports across the country are experiencing similar delays. From our vantage point at the Federal level, we try to address transportation from a systems perspective. We believe that is key to moving people and goods safely, reliably and efficiently. The FAA has developed action plans for eight of our most congested airports, including O'Hare. These eight airports represent the biggest challenges in the NAS. When they suffer delays, there's a domino effect on the entire system. Each of the eight airports is unique, and new runways are not an option for all of them. It is our hope that, working with our partners in the aviation community, implementing these action plans will maximize the growth of capacity and increase efficiencies in the system. I know you are also aware of our most recent initiative to address aviation capacity challenges--a Federal Register notice seeking the broadest possible input on steps to take at LaGuardia Airport to address congestion and delays.

In the case of O'Hare, the action plan calls for the city of Chicago, the airlines and the FAA to revisit the 1991 Chicago Delay Task Force Study. That successful collaboration resulted in a report that included specific recommendations for reducing delays at O'Hare. The majority of the recommendations were implemented--relating for the most part to air

traffic procedures and physical development--and the City of Chicago estimates that they resulted in a 40% reduction in delays at the airport. The 1991 study also recommended additional runways and related infrastructure improvements, but as you know, those were not adopted.

I applaud the City for now stepping up to the plate once again. The City has formed a second O'Hare Delay Task Force to identify both short and long-term solutions to the delay situation at the airport. It is being chaired by both City and FAA officials with broad representation from the stakeholders, including: the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT); the Indiana Department of Transportation; airlines; and aviation interest groups. The FAA will provide technical assistance through our headquarters, regional, and field staff. The task force will examine a broad band of alternatives to increase capacity and reduce delays. Those alternatives will include airfield and technology improvements, air traffic procedures, and collaborative decision making. The first meeting of the O'Hare Delay Task Force was held on June 5. While we expect the work to take approximately nine months (the first Task Force took 2 years), we are hopeful that action will be taken on delay reducing initiatives as they are identified and not deferred for a formal report at the end of the study. As before, while the Task Force will make recommendations, it will be up to the airlines, the FAA and/or the City to accept and implement the recommendations.

But O'Hare airport is only part of Chicago's regional airport system. There are five major commercial service airports that serve this part of the country. They include not only the

two air carrier airports operated by the City of Chicago--O'Hare and Midway--but also the Greater Rockford, General Mitchell International (Milwaukee), and Gary/Chicago airports. In our view, discussion about increased use and/or improvements to any or all of these facilities, including increasing the capacity of these airports through runway construction, is welcome and necessary. Whatever the upshot of these activities may be, it is also the case that they can proceed along with the ongoing consideration of a possible new supplemental airport for the region. Meaningful discussion must include both short and long-term plans for improvements to the system. Here in Chicago as elsewhere, it doesn't have to be an "either/or" proposition.

At the same time, we recognize that there is a great deal of controversy about aviation needs in the Chicago area. I don't have to reiterate to those gathered here today a detailed history of the challenges the region has faced over the past 15 years or so. Suffice it to say that efforts have been underway for some years to locate a site for a supplemental commercial service airport in the Chicago region. These efforts have been attended by a lack of consensus on a suitable site for the airport, the size of airport infrastructure, the role of existing airports, and the degree to which air carriers may institute service at a new site.

Over the past several years the FAA has worked actively with IDOT to reach an agreement on how best to proceed relative to IDOT's proposal for a south suburban airport near Peotone, Illinois, which is approximately 35 miles south of Chicago. Initially we disagreed with IDOT over the scope and timing of the proposal. The disagreement

between the agencies was entirely technical and based on the fact that we believed that the State, in its earlier proposals, had overestimated the potential demand at a new airport and that the scale of the proposed new airport exceeded that demand.

Early last year, however, we reached agreement on going forward using a tiered Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) approach. We agreed to complete a Tier 1 EIS for the first part of the State's proposal. The Tier 1 EIS considers site approval of a location for a possible future airport and landbanking, at State expense, for such a site to protect it from encroaching development. IDOT's proposal is to develop airport infrastructure at the site as aviation demand develops. At this stage, IDOT and FAA are not considering any future airport development; rather that will be done at a later time. This tiered approach recognizes that the State is approaching a new airport site in stages—site approval and landbanking first, and infrastructure considerations later.

Work on the tiered EIS is well underway. The FAA has devoted significant resources to the EIS to complete it as fast as possible. It is one of four airport proposals nationwide where FAA has established a dedicated EIS team to guide and expedite the work. The first step in the process, known as "scoping"--where the scope of the issues to be addressed are identified--has been completed. The scoping process included public meetings where Federal, State and local agencies, and the interested public provided input to the project. The FAA and its consultants are now nearing the end of the second step, completion of technical analyses and issuance of a Draft EIS by late summer. The Draft EIS will then be available for public and agency review, whereupon the EIS team

will assess whether its March 2002 schedule for completing the EIS can be accelerated any further.

It is important to note the Federal Government's role in this endeavor. In a deregulated domestic aviation industry, the Federal government no longer controls where, how and when airlines provide their services. Nor are we the driving force in airport capacity development. What drives those considerations now is the market, and local and regional decision making, in partnership with the aviation industry, in response to that market demand. Certainly, we at the Federal level will provide any support and assistance that we can, and will do our part in continuing to modernize the air traffic control system and implementing ATC efficiencies wherever possible. However, the Federal government cannot and should not solve State and local planning challenges. In Chicago, past efforts to deal with airport capacity limitations in the region failed because of lack of consensus. That appears to be changing. It is a very positive development that the City and State appear to be coming together to reach consensus for both short and long-term measures to deal with the predicted growth in operations at the region's airports. We stand ready to assist in any way that we can.

Mr. Chairman, I know that this Committee is as committed as Secretary Mineta and I are to finding the solutions to the capacity challenges we are facing. I also know that our counterparts in local and state government as well as in the aviation industry share our commitment. It is my hope that as we continue to work together on these challenges, and that the effort here in Chicago will be a model for the rest of the country in how best to

achieve solutions--even with a past history of controversy--that will benefit not only the local community, but the Nation as a whole.

This concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions at this time.

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